



Response to House Higher Education Committee September 1, 2020

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COVID-10 Pandemic Questions

(Please note that links to additional information are embedded in the responses below)

1. Are institutions of higher education ensuring the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff during the 2020 Fall Semester? When applicable, please speak directly to classroom and lab settings, dormitories, and dining halls.

[Midwestern State University has established protocols](#) for the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff. We have implemented a face-covering requirement for all individuals while on campus, including visitors. We have daily self-attestation screenings presented through our MSU Safety App and our website. We have provided [electronic reporting](#) and response processes for addressing COVID exposure or positive cases. The response includes what the individual and supervisor should do, notification procedures for exposed or potentially exposed individuals, and sanitization procedures for affected spaces. A campus contact tracer will contact students who have been exposed. We have also provided for the live streaming of all courses so that asymptomatic or minimally symptomatic students and faculty may continue with classes. Classroom capacities have been reduced to allow for social distancing, and additional retractable shields have been placed in classrooms for faculty as needed. Technology in classrooms has been enhanced to provide live streaming using Zoom and Desire 2 Learn (D2L, our learning management system). Lab capacities, schedules, and cleaning protocols have been altered to allow hands-on experiences safely.

[Dormitory safety measures](#) include capacity adjustment, to allow 48 private rooms to be set aside for students to isolate if MSU is their primary residence. Students residing in on-

campus housing are required to wear masks when not in their rooms. Common area furniture has been reduced and rearranged to promote social distancing. Beds in double-occupancy rooms without divider walls have a minimum of 10 feet distance. Additional custodial staff members have been added to ensure frequent cleaning of high-touch surfaces, including additional evening and weekend custodial coverage. Students have been assigned to specific community restrooms for the fall semester. There are no overnight guests allowed in campus housing during the fall semester.

[Dining safety measures include](#) reduced seating, allowing for social distancing between tables, with an adjacent large conference room being utilized for additional seating. Additional outdoor picnic tables have been added adjacent to dining facilities. There is no food self-service; food service staff serve all food. Grab-and-go meals have been increased so that students need not sit in the dining hall to consume a meal. The grill in the food court has been closed to reduce traffic in the food court area. All dining transactions are cashless for the semester.

[Student activities](#) are being adjusted, including no Homecoming or Family Weekend activities this fall. Programs and student organization meetings are required to comply with standards outlined in a [programming guide](#), which includes completing a [COVID-19 Event and Program Planning Form](#).

2. What plans are in place for on-campus COVID-19 testing? Do institutions have the capacity to provide testing on campus, both in terms of available supplies and labs to process tests?

MSU's approach began with questionnaire screening of resident students upon arrival with quarantine and testing of those indicating symptoms of COVID-19. MSU will test symptomatic and potentially exposed individuals throughout the academic year as part of our spread mitigation plan and contact tracing efforts. The samples will be collected in our student health center, with processing by outside laboratories. We currently project adequate supplies and lab capacity to conduct all needed testing. As part of our surveillance activities, we plan to test a random sample of 50 residential students weekly.

3. If applicable, what are plans for collegiate athletics this Fall? How will student-athletes be kept safe? If fans will be permitted to attend events, how will fans be kept safe?

Midwestern State University is a member of the NCAA Division II Lone Star Conference (LSC). On August 7, 2020, the LSC Council of Presidents elected to postpone league competition in the fall sports of football, soccer, and volleyball to the spring. These three sports may practice during the fall semester under all applicable NCAA Division II rules. Still, they may not participate in competition unless the LSC determines that scrimmages and exhibition games are allowed.

The cross country competition season will remain in the fall, while golf and tennis will also compete in the fall non-championship segment. Competition for these sports will not begin earlier than the week of September 21.

The LSC Council of Presidents also confirmed basketball may begin practices in their championship segment on October 15, but will not compete until the spring. This may change if conditions improve; MSU will abide by the LSC restrictions.

In addition to regular requirements of wearing masks and social distancing, student-athletes must comply with the following:

- a. Hand washing and use of hand sanitizers daily
- b. Completion of the MSU safety app questionnaire and temperature check by Sports Medicine before each workout
- c. Participation in training on COVID-19 protocols (also required of athletic training students, coaches, and staff)
- d. Athletics must bring their own water bottles to workouts/practices
- e. No sharing of towels by athletes
- f. Follow new room entry and exit protocols

The university has expanded facility-cleaning schedules to include athletics facilities. Grouping of student-athletes has been implemented during workouts and practices to keep students in groups, or bubbles, to limit exposure as much as possible. Testing will be in place as required by the NCAA as teams begin practice or competition.

Fans will be allowed to attend tennis matches during the fall, with limitations placed on seating to provide social distancing. If the decision were made for a fall scrimmage or inter-squad event on campus for other sports with fans allowed, protocols would be in place to limit the numbers and ensure the safety of student-athletes and any fans attending.

The LSC continues to monitor updated public health information and evaluate medical safeguards and certifications to ensure safe competition. The health and well-being of student-athletes will remain a top priority in all conference and university decisions related to athletics.

4. What do projected enrollment figures and formula funding look like to institutions for this school year?

The university has deployed multiple new and broad recruitment efforts, along with technology solutions to enhance retention. These strategies, together with expansive return to campus planning and safeguards, mitigate otherwise more significant reductions in enrollment for the fall. That said, most new international students have not been immune to federal restrictions related to COVID-19 and will have to defer their program

of studies until restrictive VISA requirements are reduced. Static graduate enrollments, coupled with demand by adult students for online nursing programs, appear to have somewhat offset declines in international student enrollment. Undergraduate student enrollments are most at risk with the economic recession and impact on family income, making the ability to afford to attend the university more difficult in these uncertain times. First-year students are especially hesitant to begin their higher education programs and have been hit hardest by COVID-19 conditions.

While the university continues to do everything to enhance enrollment and remove barriers to students, the reality in a COVID-19 environment is that the best-case scenario is projected enrollment could be flat to down by five percent. Growth is not currently anticipated at our institution during the pandemic. Given the expected course offerings, static formula rates, and a difficult economy, the university anticipates that formula funding could also be lower in the next biennium.

5. Has there been a noticeable impact on staff or faculty retention with regard to concerns about the pandemic?

Currently, the pandemic has not had a noticeable impact on faculty and staff retention. To promote retention, MSU has been as accommodating as possible to individual needs due to childcare and K-12 school closures, as well as fear of exposure given high-risk medical concerns. The university also addressed employee concerns through increased and elevated cleaning protocols, social distancing, and requiring facial coverings while on campus. During April and May, we limited our on-campus presence by offering remote work opportunities while still ensuring the continuity of our operations. With a phased transition to on-campus work beginning in June, employees had the opportunity to discuss their concerns with their supervisors, Human Resources, and disability services to ensure they felt safe as they returned to campus.

With the delay in on-campus hiring due to budget restrictions, it is too soon to make a concrete determination whether the pandemic will affect the applicant pool at MSU. Dependent upon the position offered, we do feel we will see a decline in applications.

6. Health-Related Institutions were exempt from the 5% budget cuts earlier this year, due to their in resolving the public health crisis. What are some of the programs, research, and responses to the pandemic that our Health-Related Institutions have contributed? NA
7. How have state and federal COVID-related funds already impacted budgets?

The university received \$4.6M of CARES Act funds, of which \$2.2M was disbursed in student emergency aid and assisted 3,370 (60.7%) students. The \$2.4M for institutional support provided relief to our auxiliary housing and dining operations when the university suddenly transitioned to fully online learning in March 2020. These funds provided reimbursement of \$1.7M in refunds made to students for unused housing and

dining services. The remaining CARES Act funds were used for personal protective equipment, campus signage, and the expansion of campus IT capacity to enhance flexibility in teaching and learning to support a variety of teaching modalities.

8. How has the pandemic affected the overall financial status of small and rural community colleges? **NA**
9. Does your institution have a public, online dashboard for the reporting of positive COVID-19 cases which is updated daily? If so, what is the link to the dashboard?

MSU Texas maintains a public, online dashboard of [reported cases](https://msutexas.edu/coronavirus/reported-cases.php) that is updated daily - <https://msutexas.edu/coronavirus/reported-cases.php>.